



**GLOBAL
INITIATIVE**
AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL
ORGANIZED CRIME

NORTH- EASTERN CÔTE D'IVOIRE

BETWEEN ILLICIT ECONOMIES
AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM



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SEPTEMBER 2023

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to thank all those who took the time to share their knowledge to make this report possible. Special thanks go to Oumarou Paul Koalaga, who coordinated data collection in Burkina Faso and in the border areas with Côte d'Ivoire. His invaluable contribution made it possible to produce a detailed and comprehensive report. Dozens of contributors have not been identified for reasons of security and confidentiality. The authors would also like to express their sincere thanks to the Equal Access teams, and to Bernard Bléou, Dr Parfait N'Goran and William Assanvo for their review of this report and their availability throughout the writing process.

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CONTENTS

- Executive summary..... 2
 - Methodology..... 3
- Illicit economies in a post-conflict context 4
- Developments in the security situation..... 6
 - Main trends and chronology 6
 - Sensitive areas: security and crime..... 9
 - Vulnerabilities of Comoé National Park 10
- Intersections between violent extremism and illicit economies 12
 - Highway robberies, cattle thefts and kidnappings 12
 - Artisanal gold mining: involvement of armed groups?..... 18
- Conclusion and recommendations..... 13
- Notes 25



FROM VISION TO ACTION: A DECADE OF ANALYSIS, DISRUPTION AND RESILIENCE

The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime was founded in 2013. Its vision was to mobilize a global strategic approach to tackling organized crime by strengthening political commitment to address the challenge, building the analytical evidence base on organized crime, disrupting criminal economies and developing networks of resilience in affected communities. Ten years on, the threat of organized crime is greater than ever before and it is critical that we continue to take action by building a coordinated global response to meet the challenge.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A wave of attacks hit the Bounkani region in north-eastern Côte d'Ivoire in June 2020, illustrating the presence of violent extremist groups as far north as the coastal states of West Africa, far from their bastions of influence in the central Sahel. Since then, the population has been threatened and intimidated, entire villages taken hostage, improvised explosive devices (IEDs) planted and attacks mounted on defence and security force positions.

At the same time, an increase in criminal activities such as hold-ups, cattle rustling and kidnappings has also been reported. Although several sources attribute the amplification of these three illicit economies to violent extremist groups, and sometimes rightly so, the analysis needs to be nuanced because many dynamics are at work, in parallel, which depend on a number of factors. The north of Côte d'Ivoire has long been a major trafficking zone because of its porous borders with Burkina Faso and Mali, while illicit markets proliferated during the armed rebellion that split the country in two (north and south) between 2002 and 2011. The dynamics of conflict and crime therefore need to be analyzed in this post-conflict context, as the legacy of the rebellion in the north of the country is still being felt today.

Since 2020, the threat of violent extremism has spread to the Bounkani region (Téhini, Tougbo, Bolé, Togolokaye, Kolobougou, Gôgô, Zèpou, etc.) and the Tchologo region (Kafolo), both of which border Mali and Burkina Faso. Although pressure from violent extremist groups has decreased in 2022, with fewer attacks and criminal activities recorded, this does not mean that the vulnerabilities and risks faced by north-eastern Côte d'Ivoire have disappeared. Comoé National Park, a protected area straddling the two regions, appears to be particularly vulnerable to both extremism and criminality. According to local communities, the park harbours fighters and criminal groups who take advantage of its 11 500 square kilometres of forest to carry out incursions, withdraw after attacks, hide, organize and stockpile equipment, as well as exploit subsoil resources, particularly gold.

This research report is part of a wider workstream of the Observatory of Illicit Economies in West Africa, which aims to document the role of parks and nature reserves in the development of illicit economies and conflict dynamics.¹ The vulnerability of national parks to becoming hubs for illicit economies was highlighted by a hotspot-mapping initiative led by the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC), which mapped 280 illicit hubs in West Africa, Cameroon and the Central African Republic.² This initiative identified 14 national parks in the region that are key in the network of illicit economies, half of which play an important role as vectors of conflict and instability. This is the case in Comoé National Park, as well as in the W-Arly-Pendjari complex and certain forests in Nigeria (Sambisa for example). The criminal markets most frequently detected are the illicit extraction and trade of gold, kidnapping for ransom and arms trafficking, which deserve to be emphasized given the close links identified between these illicit economies, conflicts and instability.³

Methodology

This study was carried out in two regions of northern Côte d'Ivoire bordering Comoé National Park, namely the Bounkani and Tchologo regions. The field surveys were carried out in two phases. The first phase took place between August and September 2022, with interviews conducted in Bouna, Tehini, Gôgô, Kouinta, Doropo and Nassian for the Bounkani region and in Ouangolodougou, Kahoura and Kafolo for the Tchologo region. A second phase in January 2023 was used to verify some of the results and to focus on the border area between Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire, a key zone for more in-depth observation of the dynamics of conflict and trafficking in and around Comoé National Park. The interviews for this second phase took place in the towns of Gaoua and Kampti in Burkina Faso, and Doropo, Tehini and Bouna in Côte d'Ivoire.

This study was based on a qualitative approach using semi-structured individual interviews and group discussions, direct observation and documentary analysis, as well as the expertise developed by the GI-TOC, including the mapping of hubs which identified hotspots in the north-east of the country.⁴ This qualitative survey is based on more than 45 individual interviews and 10 group discussions, as well as 10 interviews conducted remotely with experts and members of international organizations. In the field, the research team conducted a series of interviews with defence and security forces officers, religious authorities (imams, priests, pastors), state representatives (prefects, sub-prefects), community leaders (village chiefs), journalists, ex-combatants, association leaders (youth and women), local civil society organizations (particularly those working to defend human rights, promote development and gender equality and religious denominations), economic operators, artisanal gold miners and traders and transporters from the informal sector.



ILLICIT ECONOMIES IN A POST-CONFLICT CONTEXT

To understand the interaction between violent extremism and crime in north-eastern Côte d'Ivoire, it is first necessary to understand the role played by illicit economies during the civil war (2002–2011). This is important because these economies then took root during the process of post-conflict state reconstruction and, since 2020, these economies have again evolved with the new threat posed by violent extremist groups.

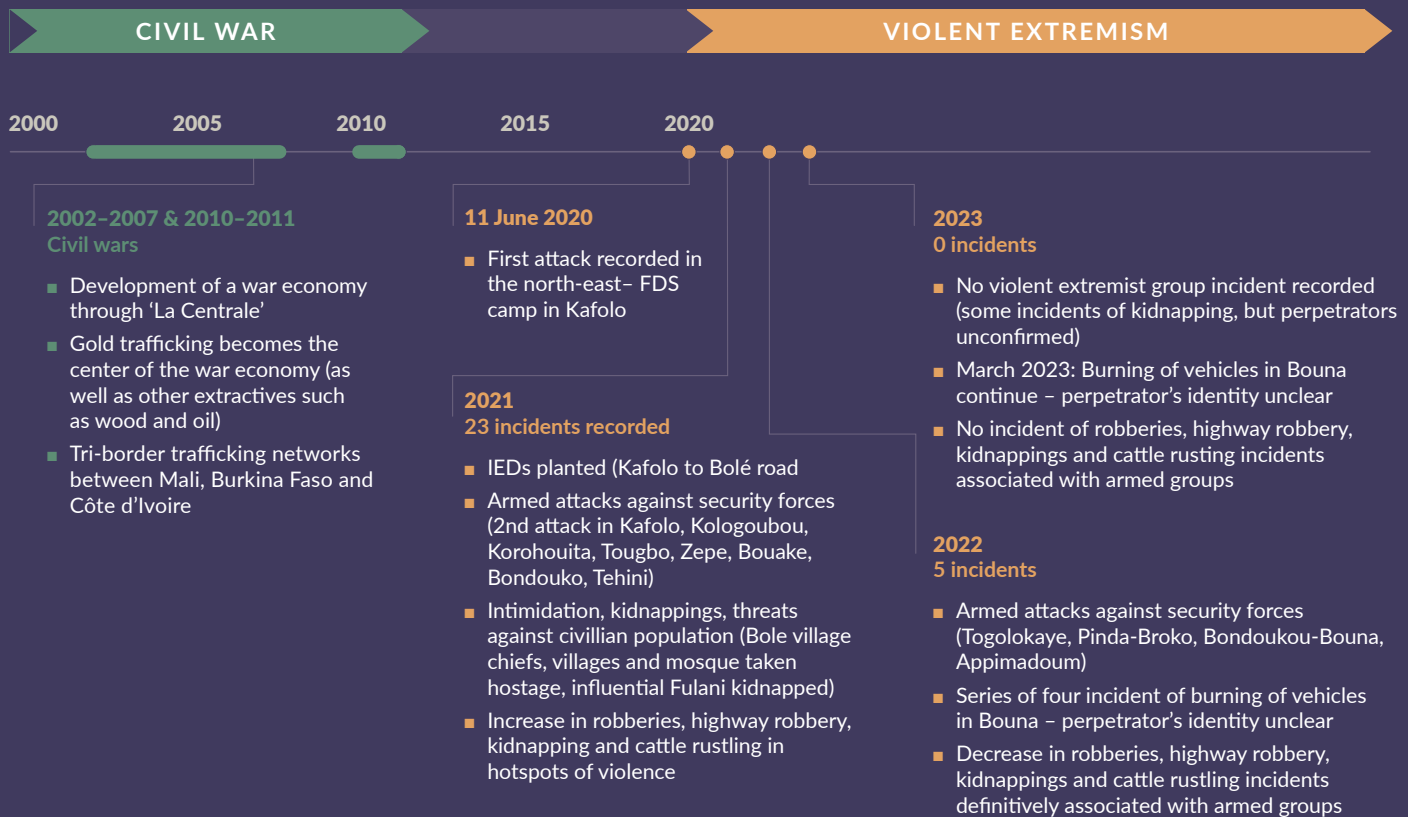
During the civil war (2002–2011), the northern half of the country was completely beyond central government control and regulation. Throughout this decade of crisis, rebel groups governed economic life in the part of the country they occupied. The war economy they organized focused heavily on the exploitation of natural resources.⁵ To finance the rebellion and regulate economic life, the rebel leaders set up a structure to pool the funds generated by the exploitation of resources in the area under their control. Called 'La Centrale', this structure served as a single fund for the rebellion. It collected taxes on the sale of agricultural raw materials, timber, hydrocarbons, consumer goods, motorbikes, gold, etc⁶

As the north of the country was cut off from the south and therefore from international trade via Abidjan, trade developed with neighbouring countries such as Mali, Burkina Faso and Guinea. As part of a triangular trade, networks began transporting fuel, wood, cannabis and other contraband from Mali and Burkina Faso into Côte d'Ivoire, and gold from Côte d'Ivoire to Burkina Faso.⁷ This economy was therefore almost entirely informal and, in addition to the sectors and resources managed by the rebellion, many opportunists, including from neighbouring countries, joined in to take advantage of the smuggling opportunities facilitated by this economic model.

Artisanal gold mining played a particularly important role in the war economy during this period. Although the practice largely preceded the armed rebellion, a developed gold mining economy developed in Côte d'Ivoire from 2002, with the start of the rebellion. According to a miner interviewed in 2017 in Doropo (Bouna) on the border with Burkina Faso: 'Before the war, we worked in the fields; gold was unknown to us.'⁸

Authorizations to exploit mining sites were issued by 'Centrale' officials, who collected taxes on the sale of gold. This policy of exploiting gold for the upkeep of soldiers and the personal enrichment of rebel leaders led to a boom in the artisanal gold mining economy.⁹ This gold rush was also amplified by the arrival of workers and traders from Mali and Burkina Faso.¹⁰ These seasoned foreign players

SECURITY EVENTS IN CÔTE D'IVOIRE (2002–2023)



forged commercial relationships with some of the rebel leaders, who provided protection for their activities or employed them directly.¹¹

At the end of the war, 'La Centrale' was disbanded and a process of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration was undertaken.¹² However, as is often the case in post-conflict contexts, criminal interests remained strong among the rebel leaders who later became senior state officials, which led to a certain alignment of criminal and political interests.¹³

At the lower end of the scale, the lack of economic alternatives offered by the state post-conflict has meant that those involved have continued the illicit economic activities they developed during the rebellion (artisanal gold mining, trafficking in timber, diamonds, hydrocarbons, motorbikes and general smuggling of consumer goods). Ten years after the end of the conflict, illicit economies remain a source of income for many people, and the legacy of a decade of rebellion is still being felt.

Since 2020, a new player has entered the region: illicit economies are undergoing a complete transformation with the gradual emergence of violent extremist groups who see trafficking as a financial opportunity and have developed a strategy to take advantage of Comoé National Park and the border area with Burkina Faso.



DEVELOPMENTS IN THE SECURITY SITUATION

Main trends and chronology

After an initial attack claimed by al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in Grand-Bassam in the south of the country in March 2016, Côte d'Ivoire has experienced a surge in violent extremism in its north-east since 2020. Côte d'Ivoire is not alone in facing this new threat, with neighbouring coastal countries such as Togo and Benin, and to a lesser extent Ghana, also facing the expansion of groups from the central Sahel (Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger).¹⁴ This new trend is mainly driven by cells linked to Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM), a coalition of groups affiliated to al-Qaeda, formed in 2017.

Although the attacks have not been claimed – and most of those interviewed did not refer to the attackers by the group's name but spoke of 'armed groups', 'jihadists' or 'terrorists' – security experts agree that cells linked to JNIM, and in particular to Katibat Macina (a member of the JNIM coalition), are operating in north-eastern Côte d'Ivoire. JNIM is very active in south-west Burkina Faso, and is by far the largest violent extremist group present in Burkina Faso and Mali in 2023. The presence of the Islamic State Sahel Province is reported more in the east of Burkina Faso, on the border with Niger, and has never been reported in the south-west of Burkina Faso, or in the region under study.¹⁵

Since June 2020, the date of the first major attack on a defence and security forces (Forces de défense et de sécurité, FDS) position in Kafolo, the presence of violent extremist groups has been felt in the Bounkani and Tchologo regions, which cover part of Comoé National Park close to the border with Burkina Faso. This presence has manifested in three types of events: direct attacks on FDS positions, the planting of IEDs and acts of intimidation against the population by taking mosques and entire villages hostage (as in Bolé in May 2021 and Kafolo in June 2021).¹⁶ In addition to violent acts, JNIM cells attach great importance to gathering information. They do this in a number of ways when they establish themselves in a new region, including through kidnappings and impersonating civilians,¹⁷ in search of intelligence on the positions of the FDS, among other things. For example, JNIM members may pose as shepherds and herdsmen, gold miners, customers in shops and markets, and so on.¹⁸

The year 2021 was by far the most active for violent extremist groups.¹⁹ The second attack on the FDS in Kafolo in March 2021 (although the first attack had already been large-scale and sophisticated) involved more than a hundred fighters and the use of rocket launchers, machine guns and Kalashnikovs,

and was launched on several fronts. This led several security sources and analysts to speak of a 'threshold crossed', and 'a new stage in the rise of jihadism in Côte d'Ivoire'.²⁰ However, this peak in activity in 2021 did not continue with the same intensity in 2022 and 2023. In fact, since 2022, the number of security incidents has fallen, leading one source to speak of a lull.²¹ Only three attacks against the armed forces were recorded in the first three months of 2022, and they targeted the area between Bouna and Bondoukou, in particular the village of Pinda-Broko, indicating a shift in activities from the Burkina Faso border to the Ghanaian border. No acts of intimidation against communities by extremist groups or IED planting has been recorded since October 2021, according to data from the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) and interviews conducted during data collection.²²

Despite a reduction in the activities of violent extremist groups, this does not necessarily mean that they are in a weaker position or that they have withdrawn from the areas in question. The groups carried out numerous attacks in 2021, showing they were still present, but it is possible that they are now becoming more discreet in order to infiltrate the region without arousing too much suspicion and avoid direct confrontations with the FDS.²³ A series of incidents involving the burning of vehicles in Bounkani took place in August and November 2022, and again in March 2023.²⁴ Regardless of the identity of the perpetrators (which could not be definitively established), the reaction to these incidents shows the high level of fear that the presence of violent extremist groups continues to inspire in communities and the authorities, despite the decrease in attacks.²⁵



An Ivorian soldier provides security as Ivorian Prime Minister Patrick Achi arrives to launch a plan to help young people in the border regions of Mali and Burkina Faso, where jihadist groups are trying to recruit. Tougbo, 22 January 2022. © Sia Kambou/AFP via Getty Images

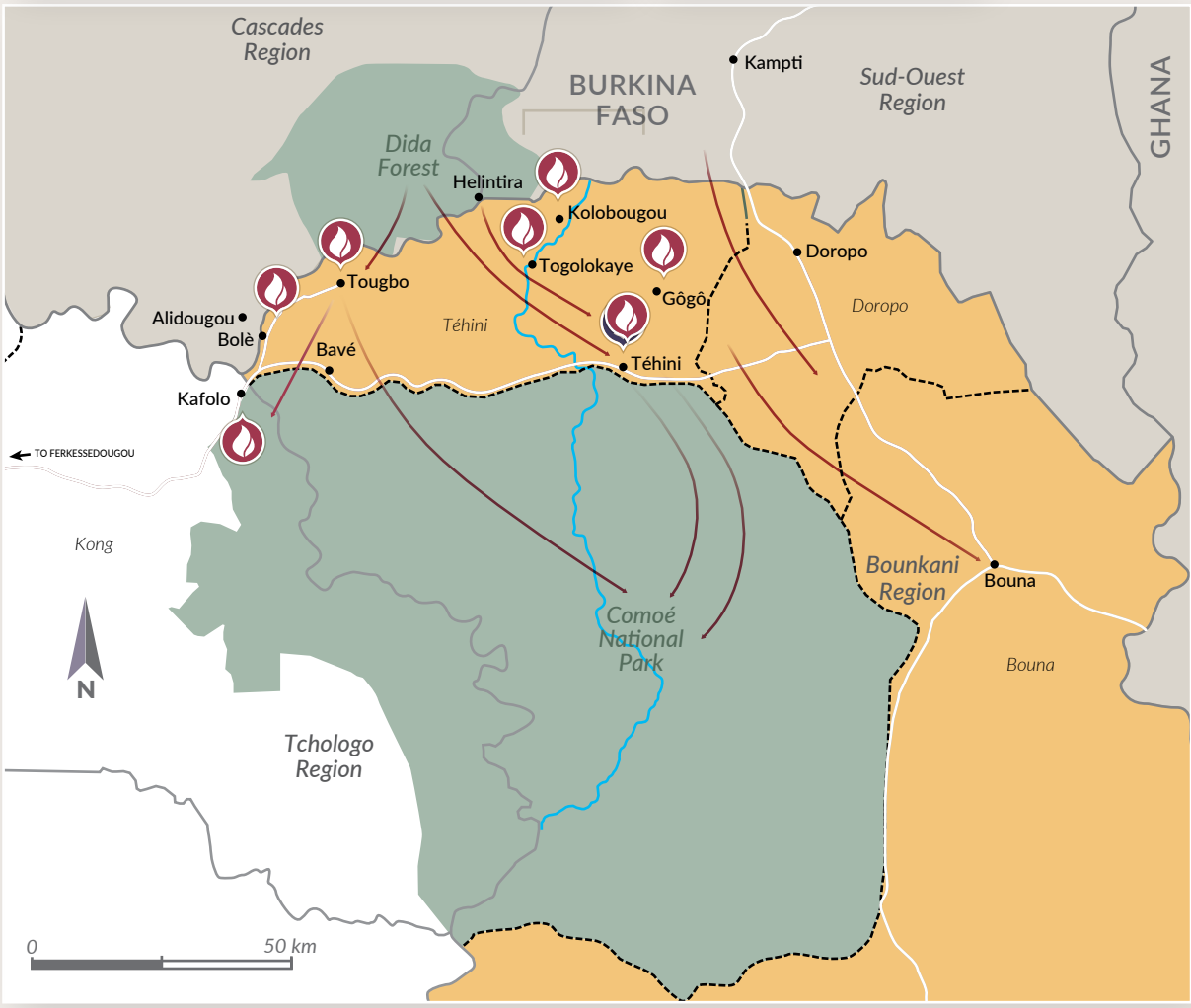
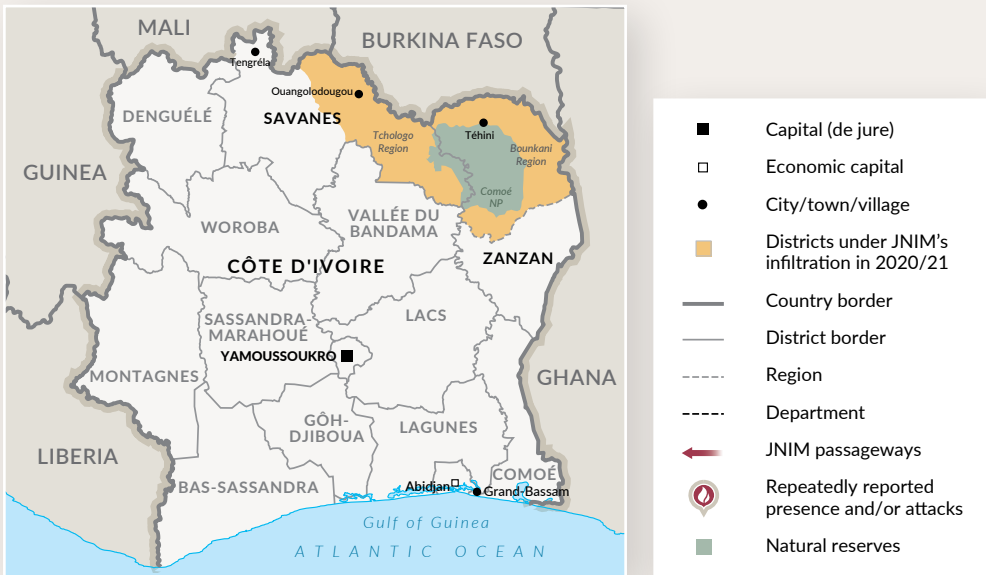


FIGURE 1 Reported presence of JNIM in Bounkani and Tchologo (2021-2023).

Sensitive areas: security and crime

Although this study does not aim to establish exhaustively the localities or areas where extremist groups have operated over the last three years, some areas have been identified as particularly sensitive, due to their infiltration by armed groups, but also as key areas for illicit economies. As in other regions of the Sahel, the areas affected by conflict and crime are increasingly overlapping, as armed groups expand their areas of operation.²⁶ The north-east of Côte d'Ivoire is no exception and the crossings and retreat zones being used by armed groups have been used by criminal groups for many years to move goods (licit or illicit) across the border.

All the stakeholders we met mentioned the porous nature of the 300-kilometre border between Burkina Faso and the Bounkani region, with hundreds of illegal crossing points that allow everyone, including violent extremist and criminal groups, to come and go without being checked.

A smuggler active in the border area explains that he can easily get to the Ivorian side because 'we don't have any borders in our business, especially as the same communities are here in Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso'.²⁷ Several dozen tracks link the town of Kampti in Burkina Faso, the last major town before the border, to Doropo or Tehini, at the entrance to Comoé National Park and, according to the smuggler, 'it's very easy to get round the border post on the national road'.²⁸ Illegal crossings were used even more frequently after the official closure of Côte d'Ivoire's land borders during the COVID-19 pandemic – a situation that lasted almost two years, with the borders only reopening in February 2023.²⁹ Further west, in the Tougbo sub-prefecture alone, between the Dida forest in Burkina Faso and Comoé National Park, the FDS counted more than 700 unofficial crossing routes.³⁰

It should be noted that attacks by violent extremist groups in the Tougbo and Kafolo localities have led to a reduction in smuggling with Burkina Faso. According to some of the traders interviewed, the fear of running into violent extremist groups has led them to stop their smuggling activities.

Violent extremist groups have begun to operate along the routes and areas known and used by smugglers and traffickers, i.e. corridors and areas through which people can easily transit without being checked. Two main routes were described as particularly coveted by JNIM, both linking the Dida forest on the Burkinabé side (a refuge for the groups) to Comoé National Park.³¹ The first is to the west, towards the Tougbo locality on the Ivorian side (5 kilometres from the Burkina Faso border), which was the target of attacks in June 2021 and July 2022. Several local sources have also reported seeing members of armed groups on motorbikes in the village on market day, disguising their identities by pretending to be shopkeepers.³² The second crossing point lies slightly further east, linking the Dida forest to Tehini, a locality on the edge of Comoé National Park, which has seen several incidents including an attack on a gendarmerie post in March 2021 and several IED attacks on FDS patrols on the Tehini–Togolokaye axis (towards Burkina Faso).³³ According to some sources, this corridor is another entry point into the national park.

Inside Côte d'Ivoire, the area between the towns of Bouna, Tehini, Kafolo, Tougbo and Doropo is considered to be a zone where armed groups can move around, using their rear bases on the Burkina Faso side, and gain access to Comoé National Park.³⁴ Indeed, on the Burkinabé side, cells linked to JNIM have been active since 2018 in several localities in the Sud-Ouest and Cascades regions, with dozens of incidents recorded in border localities, including clashes with *Volontaires pour la défense de la patrie* (Volunteers for the Defence of the Homeland, VDP).³⁵ Numerous villages have been attacked and emptied of their inhabitants, with armed groups then moving in and using them to attack localities on the Ivorian side, such as Djigoué³⁶ and Hélintira.³⁷



Ivorian anti-jihadist soldiers at the entrance to an Ivorian army camp in the Kafolo region, northern Côte d'Ivoire, January 2022. © Sia Kambou/AFP via Getty Images

Within Comoé National Park, sources are much less clear about where armed groups are active, or even if they are. Communities are convinced that armed groups are present in the park, relying mainly on accounts of people who have been abducted, but also on rumours. Security sources insist that armed groups have not infiltrated the park.³⁸ For others, current information does not allow us to conclude definitively that the park is a base for armed terrorist groups. Infiltration, as such, is less contested, but 'at this stage, we cannot talk about sanctuary (...) the groups are mobile and come and go, and it would be difficult to talk about control of any particular area of the park'.³⁹

Vulnerabilities of Comoé National Park

Although it is not possible to determine their exact presence in Comoé National Park, the park is particularly vulnerable to incursions by violent extremist groups. Throughout West Africa, national parks are areas of increasing concern to government actors as violent extremist groups expand their geographical presence. As national parks are key areas for illicit activities (such as artisanal gold mining, logging and wildlife trafficking), the risk of armed groups exploiting these resources to finance themselves is a source of concern when they begin to operate in and around parks. This is the case, for example, in the W-Arly-Pendjari (WAP) complex, located in the tri-border area between Burkina Faso, Benin and Niger, but also in other parks such as Niokolo-Koba National Park (Senegal), Boubou Ndjida (Cameroon), and the Sambisa and Dansadau forests (Nigeria).⁴⁰ The WAP is particularly difficult to manage because it encompasses three borders, which is not the case for Comoé National Park. This difference was cited several times by our sources to distinguish the dynamics between the two areas and explain why infiltration is not as easy in Comoé National Park – the park being landlocked inside Ivorian territory, 50 kilometres from the border.⁴¹

Parks are particularly vulnerable to the activities of both violent extremist groups and illicit activities for three main reasons. Firstly, they are often remote, wooded or forested areas, offering perfect hiding places.⁴² The parks therefore function well as rear bases, often used to fall back on after an attack, to store all kinds of goods and to hold hostages until a ransom is paid (see the section on kidnappings). Secondly, the presence of the state is often more limited, even when it is fully operational. Forest guards in Côte d'Ivoire, who are agents of the Ivorian Office of Parks and Reserves (OIPR), are often the main actors responsible for guarding protected areas and are neither sufficiently equipped nor trained to deal with the threat of violent extremist groups.⁴³

Thirdly, illicit economies in West African national parks have been identified by the GI-TOC's Illicit Economies and Instability Monitor as playing an important role as vectors of conflict and instability.⁴⁴ The illicit gold trade, kidnapping for ransom, cattle rustling and arms trafficking⁴⁵ are the illicit economies most frequently detected in West African national parks, and are also markets described as 'accelerants'. This term is used to describe markets that contribute significantly to instability and which are themselves fuelled by instability.⁴⁶ These four illicit economies are often found within the same conflict hubs or hotspots, as an increase in violence creates a demand for arms trafficking, and arms trafficking in turn increases the level of violence in incidents of cattle rustling and kidnapping.

In the north-east of Côte d'Ivoire and Comoé National Park, the major illicit economies are those mentioned above, plus banditry (road blockages, robberies), which is also the subject of this study. The park's dual role – the security factor (rear base) and the presence of illicit economies (financial resources and role in governance) – means that it is particularly vulnerable to the expansion of violent extremist groups.

The sections below look first at the illicit economies that fall under the heading of generalized banditry (in particular highway robbery, cattle rustling and kidnappings) and then at artisanal gold mining.



A sign in the Comoé National Park in Bouna, north-eastern Côte d'Ivoire, prohibiting certain activities, including artisanal gold mining, January 2019. © Sia Kambou/AFP via Getty Images



INTERSECTION BETWEEN VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND ILLICIT ECONOMIES

Highway robberies, cattle thefts and kidnappings

These three illicit markets, which emerged from the interviews conducted as part of this study, have a strong link with instability, as explained above, and are particularly interesting to analyze when violent extremist groups are infiltrating new areas. Indeed, illicit economies often serve as entry points for armed groups. The early stages of territorial infiltration are typically accompanied by an increase in criminal activity in the targeted areas, before the first direct attacks on FDS.

As well as an increase in the three accelerant markets (cattle rustling, kidnappings and arms trafficking), a rise in banditry (highway robberies, hold-ups, burglaries, vehicle thefts, armed robberies and murders) was also reported.⁴⁷ In a study by Equal Access carried out during the same period, these four types of activity were described by communities as signs of a deteriorating security situation – early warning signs of infiltration by violent extremist groups – which reinforces the observations and the concept of the GI-TOC accelerant market.⁴⁸

In West Africa, particularly in Mali and Burkina Faso where violent extremist groups have been operating since 2012 and 2016 respectively, and in the north of coastal countries since late 2019 (including north-east Côte d'Ivoire), similar links between illicit economies and conflict dynamics can be seen as groups extend their influence over new areas.⁴⁹ The link is partly explained by the fact that armed groups generally recruit members of criminal groups because they are ideal recruits – they know the environment very well (safe heavens, crossing points, positions of the FDS), and are sometimes already armed: this phenomenon is known as the 'jihadization' of banditry.⁵⁰

However, it is difficult to assess whether violent extremist groups are behind the increase in crime, and it is essential to stress that the increase in banditry is not necessarily the result of the stronger presence of violent extremist groups in a given area.

Caution must be exercised in establishing links between illicit activities and violent extremist groups, as the fact that these two dynamics appear in parallel does not necessarily mean that there is a causal link between the two, and many factors can have an impact. Nevertheless, our data collection has enabled us to draw certain conclusions, which we analyze in detail below.



General view of the village of Sokourani, near Ferkessedougou, the capital of the Tchologo region in northern Côte d'Ivoire, close to the borders with Burkina Faso and Mali. © Issouf Sanogo/AFP via Getty Images

Robberies and highway robbery

The phenomenon of *coupeur de route* (highway robbery) and robberies has increased sharply since 2020, and was particularly high during 2021. Certain routes linking key localities such as the Tehini–Kafolo, Tehini–Doropo, Tehini–Bouna, Tehini–Tougbo roads, but also Bolé–Kafolo, Bolé–Ferkessedougou, and even Kafolo–Tehini–Bouna roads, are considered to be particularly prone to attacks by road bandits.⁵¹ In addition to highway robbers, who generally steal from buses, lorries and cars using these routes, there has also been an increase in shop robberies and house burglaries, which are similar in nature, as they involve looting resources. Between 2020 and 2021, more than 40 incidents were recorded by the FDS,⁵² a significant increase according to the authorities, with an estimated amount of FCFA 14 million (around €21 000) stolen between October 2020 and March 2021 in hold-ups.⁵³ A decrease in highway robbery was noted by the authorities in 2022, which coincided with a decrease in attacks committed by violent extremist groups.

For the authorities and defence and security forces we spoke to during this study, there was no doubt that these incidents are linked to the spread of violent extremism in the region, and that armed groups rely on them to finance their operations and to intimidate influential local figures and communities as a whole.⁵⁴ These incidents were also mentioned by the populations of the Bounkani and Tchologo regions, who felt that highway robberies contribute to the illicit economies that fuel the actions of violent extremist groups.⁵⁵ However, this view is not shared by all, and some community members felt that the robberies are the work of bandits with no link to armed groups, or that they are acts of revenge or score-settling between individuals. The study did not independently establish a link between hold-ups and violent extremism.

For kidnappings and cattle rustling, although not all incidents could be linked to armed groups, the analysis of individual cases allows some conclusions to be drawn about the involvement of armed groups in these criminal economies.

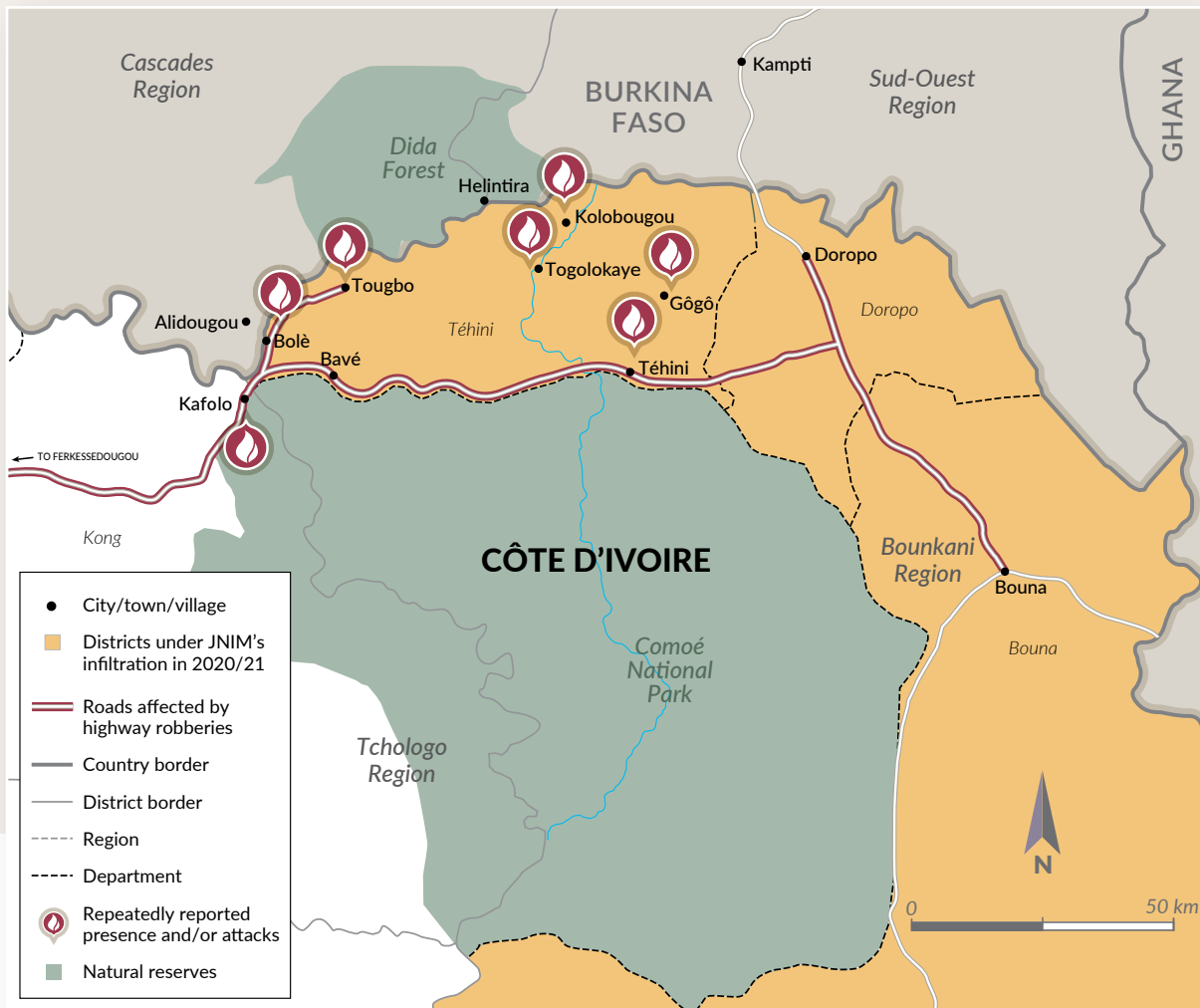


FIGURE 2 Highway robbery and reported presence of JNIM.

SOURCES: Equal Access, ACLED, GI-TOC

Kidnappings

As with hold-ups and highway robbers, an increase in kidnappings in north-east Côte d'Ivoire was reported by the authorities and communities interviewed during our data collection for the period from 2020 to 2021, although a return to calm was noted from 2022 onwards. While obtaining accurate figures was impossible, these trends emerged from interviews with stakeholders in Bounkani and Tchologo, most of whom had the impression that kidnappings had increased in 2020 and 2021, and then decreased from the beginning of 2022. The two main reasons given for the increase in kidnappings were intimidation and ransom.

The apparent increase is not surprising given the presence of violent extremist groups. Indeed, JNIM systematically uses kidnapping as a strategic tool in many areas of the Sahel and in the north of coastal countries in the region, particularly Côte d'Ivoire and Benin. An increase in kidnappings in a given area can serve as an early warning sign that the group has begun to infiltrate a community.

JNIM's aim in the initial phase of infiltration is to intimidate, targeting village chiefs, religious leaders, teachers, and any influential person who occupies a strategic position within the community that the group is trying to infiltrate.⁵⁶ In Burkina Faso, for example, data shows that kidnappings in Soum

Province (Sahel region) – the first to be infiltrated by JNIM – accounted for more than 50 per cent of all kidnappings recorded in the country in 2018, compared with just one kidnapping in 2022 (or 0.4 per cent of all kidnapping cases) because the group had become well established in the area by 2022.⁵⁷ The modus operandi for these kidnappings involves detention for days, weeks or even months, during which time the group explains its objective and how the victim will help the group to further its influence in the area in question. If they agree to cooperate, the victim is released and becomes, under duress, a supporter of the group. If they do not, they are either killed or forced out of the area because they can no longer live there safely.⁵⁸

This dynamic was described by many people, including a village chief who said that ‘anyone suspected by the terrorists of talking about them can be kidnapped, so people live in fear and don’t want to talk about anything’.⁵⁹ An example of a kidnapping of this kind was reported in Tehini, where a Fulani community leader was kidnapped in 2021 near Kouinta, on the Tehini–Kafolo axis, and spent more than two months in detention in Comoé National Park. No ransom was demanded for his release, and he was seemingly kidnapped because of his status as a influential member of the Fulani community.⁶⁰ Since his release, the community has been wary of him because they feel that ‘the fact that he did not pay a ransom means that he has become an accomplice of the terrorists, otherwise they would not have released him’.⁶¹

On the other side of the border, in south-west Burkina Faso, more than 20 kidnappings were recorded by the authorities in 2022.⁶² According to a gendarme stationed in Kampti, who admitted that many cases go unreported and that the real number is much higher, the same dynamics can be observed. For example, in September 2022, the king of the Gan, an influential leader recognized by the administrative and political authorities in the Loropéni region, was abducted.⁶³ A security source indicated that he was transferred to Côte d’Ivoire and, at the time of writing, has still not been released.⁶⁴ According to the gendarme, others are targeted because they provide information to the authorities, because they refuse to collaborate with the groups or because they have money and can pay a ransom.⁶⁵

This economic motive is also present in the north-east of Côte d’Ivoire. In these cases, the victims are often wealthy traders or their families. Incidents of this type have been reported in Bolé, Tougbo and Tehini, where five kidnappings for ransom have been recorded, and occurred during attacks between September 2020 and July 2021. According to a recent study, these five kidnappings generated at least 45 million FCFA, with the victims each paying between 5 and 20 million FCFA for their release.⁶⁶ A sixth case was reported, involving the kidnapping of a farmer’s son, who had to pay 6 million FCFA, 125 oxen (the value of an ox is between 150 000 and 200 000 FCFA) and two motorbikes. This case demonstrates the very close links between kidnapping and cattle rustling.⁶⁷

In some cases, our sources mentioned that the kidnapers took the victims into Comoé National Park and kept them there for several weeks or months.⁶⁸ Three people who were abducted between 2020 and 2022 explained that they had been held in Comoé National Park by violent extremist groups, who gave speeches about their jihadist ambitions and methods, asked them to convert to Islam and were dressed in clearly recognizable clothing.⁶⁹ The national parks and forests of the region, particularly in north-west Nigeria (Kamuku, Dansadua and Sububu forests) and the WAP complex, are often used to shelter hostages abducted either by criminal or violent extremist groups, as these areas are beyond the reach of the FDS and the hostages can easily be hidden from air patrols thanks to the thick vegetation.⁷⁰

TWO MAIN DRIVERS OF KIDNAPPINGS ON CÔTE D'IVOIRE/ BURKINA FASO BORDER



INTIMIDATION OF INFLUENTIAL FIGURES

- Timing: early stages of infiltration
- Targets: influential leaders or prospective collaborators
- Spike in kidnappings can serve as early-warning mechanism
- Côte d'Ivoire (mid-2021): kidnapping of Fulani leader in Kouinta, on the road between Téhini and Kafolo
- Burkina Faso (septembre 2022): King of Gan community kidnapped, Loropéni, Burkina Faso, allegedly detained in Comoé National Park



FINANCING

- Targets: Wealthy individuals
- Hotspot: Bolé, Tougo, Téhini
 - Five incidents between September 2020 and July 2021 for a total ransom of 45 million FCFA (69 000 EUR)
- Strong link with cattle rusting and owners: kidnapping of the son of wealthy cattle owner mid-2021, freed in return for a ransom of 125 oxen and two motorbikes

It is therefore clear that violent extremist groups have been behind the surge in kidnappings for intimidation, and probably behind some of the kidnappings for ransom, although not all cases can be attributed to them. Some kidnappings for ransom are a matter of settling scores between criminals operating in the same areas. It is very likely that the reality lies somewhere in between, i.e. that some kidnappings are the result of the spread of violent extremism and others of local realities such as inter- and intra-community conflicts.

Livestock theft

Since 2016, the Tchologo region has seen an upsurge in organized crime, mainly involving cattle rustling. A network was dismantled in 2019 by the Ivorian authorities, revealing links between cattle rustling and certain key figures in the region's violent extremism networks. The network, led by a certain Hadou, was based in Ouangolodougou, and carried out cattle thefts worth more than 60 million FCFA between 2017 and 2019. Hadou had links with someone known as Hamza, who was close to Katibat Macina and its leader Amadou Koufa who had sent him to develop a local Katibat Macina cell.⁷¹ Hamza was also close to Ali Sidibé, known as 'Sofiane', who was arrested by the Ivorian authorities and accused of coordinating the Kafolo attack in June 2020.⁷²

During the course of our study, we were unable to identify any new networks or profiles of individuals with organic or personal links to the networks of violent extremist groups. After the dismantling of

the Hadou network, the scale of cattle theft decreased, according to the authorities, then increased again in 2020 and 2021, in parallel with the rise of extremist groups, before decreasing again from 2022 onwards.⁷³

Certain elements, such as the modus operandi, routes and places of sale, lead us to conclude that the involvement of violent extremist groups in the criminal ecosystem of livestock theft did not cease in 2019, even if a new network has not been identified at this stage.

In terms of modus operandi, although cattle rustling is an old phenomenon in the areas around Comoé National Park, the looting of entire herds is a new dynamic that has been observed since the influence of violent extremist groups increased in the region. The change in scale in Côte d'Ivoire in 2020 and 2021, from a few heads to entire herds, is a development that has been seen elsewhere in the region, particularly in central Mali (since 2015) and northern Burkina Faso (since 2017),⁷⁴ but also in north-west Nigeria (since 2011)⁷⁵ – and points to the involvement of armed groups in cattle rustling. In addition, security sources and traditional authorities, as well as community members familiar with the cattle-selling market, have said that thefts have particularly increased in the areas of Tehini, Tougbo, Bolé, Zépou, Doropo, and in Comoé National Park, where violent extremist groups are most active.⁷⁶

On the subject of routes and points of sale, the porous nature of the borders with Mali and Burkina Faso allows those who steal cattle to sell them on the other side of the border. Ouangolodougou, in the Tchologo region, is a key transit point in the north-east of Côte d'Ivoire, at the centre of a network of legal and illegal goods moving between the three countries. It is a lucrative transit zone for drugs, fuel, contraband, arms and livestock.⁷⁷ Typically, stolen livestock from central Mali and Burkina Faso are transported to Ouangolodougou for onward sale and consumption in cities such as Abidjan.⁷⁸ Doropo is also a transit hub for cattle: 'every day, two trailers leave Doropo for Abidjan', according to a transporter interviewed in Bouna.⁷⁹ A trader explained that 'at the livestock market in Doropo, most of the cattle come from Burkina Faso. We don't know whether the cattle have been stolen or not'.⁸⁰

Several of those interviewed claimed that, during 2020–2021, the stolen herds were taken to JNIM-controlled localities in Burkina Faso, instead of being directed to and sold in other towns in the interior of Côte d'Ivoire, such as Bouaké, Doropo or Ouangolodougou, or in the large urban centres in the south of the country where the meat is consumed.⁸¹



A Fulani herder tends to his cows near Ouangolodougou, in northern Côte d'Ivoire, close to the borders with Burkina Faso and Mali, June 2020. © Issouf Sanogo/AFP via Getty Images

One cattle owner, whose herd had been stolen in Tehini, launched an extensive search and found his herd heading for Kampti in Burkina Faso, which is not the usual route for selling cattle.⁸² This led one traditional authority to conclude that, although the leader of the Hadou network has been arrested, people affiliated with or working for JNIM are behind some incidents of cattle rustling, as the animals are being transported to their area of influence.⁸³

Artisanal gold mining: involvement of armed groups?

Legacy of the civil war

Livestock farming and gold mining are the two economic mainstays of the area. Artisanal gold mining, however, is much more marked by the history of the rebellion, a legacy that is still felt today. Although the networks established during the civil war still exist, and continue to collude with the authorities, the latter are now concerned about the presence of violent extremist groups and their potential involvement, direct or indirect, in artisanal gold mining in north-east Côte d'Ivoire.

Following the post-election conflict in 2011, which also marked the end of the rebellion launched in 2002, former rebel fighters lost influence in their traditional strongholds and their role in gold mining was undermined. But some members of the rebellion who managed mining resources did not give up immediately. In 2015, the final report of the United Nations Group of Experts on Côte d'Ivoire emphasized that 'the massive presence of military personnel involved in illegal gold production' did not allow significant progress to be made in closing down illegal deposits, as envisaged by the Ministry of Industry and Mines.⁸⁴

Today, this situation has changed, although it cannot be ruled out that ex-rebels continue to profit from artisanal gold mining, particularly through intermediaries from whom they collect taxes.⁸⁵ In any case, the networks established during the rebellion and in subsequent years continue to function. The major operators (the site owners and traders) are still active, as are their supply chains, particularly in Burkina Faso. Most of the gold mined in north-eastern Côte d'Ivoire is sold in Burkina Faso, passing through Gaoua before being transported to Ouagadougou.⁸⁶

Moreover, gold miners no longer need the support of ex-rebels to operate, having forged links with traditional chiefs and local authorities (Ministry of Mines agents, customs officers, gendarmes).⁸⁷ For example, in November 2022, two agents from the OIPR were sentenced to two months in prison for providing gold miners with information on the deployment and positions of forest rangers in Comoé National Park, for between 100 000 and 150 000 FCFA.⁸⁸

But since 2020, the dynamics have changed again. Throughout the sub-region, the fear that artisanal gold mining could become a source of funding for violent extremist groups has led to strong reactions from the state and measures taken to ban the activity, sometimes with counterproductive effects.⁸⁹ In Côte d'Ivoire, following a series of deadly attacks in 2020, large-scale operations were undertaken – including the formation of a special group made up of gendarmes and agents from the water and forests ministry – to combat artisanal gold mining and stop it from being used to finance violent extremist groups.⁹⁰

In the Bounkani and Tchologo regions, artisanal gold mining characteristically takes place in two distinct locations: within Comoé National Park and in the rural and peri-urban area surrounding the park. This leads to two different operating models for artisanal gold mining.

Artisanal gold mining around Comoé National Park

Outside the park, it is customary authorities who regulate the activity on their territory. According to a former artisanal gold miner in Bouna: 'You need the agreement of the customary leader to be able to look for gold here (...) You can't do it on people's land without the agreement of the owners. So you have to go through the customary authorities.'⁹¹ Customary authority representatives are respected by local communities, but under national law they are not responsible for regulating the practice, for example by issuing mining permits. The practice of artisanal gold mining is therefore still illegal from the point of view of the mining code, but is perceived as legitimate in the eyes of those involved.

A former gold miner went even further, mentioning the sometimes direct involvement of traditional chiefs in the activity: 'There are even village chiefs who are gold miners.'⁹² It should be noted that in the north-east of Côte d'Ivoire, local and national politics are based on customary authority, which often acts as an interface between politicians and the local population. According to the same source, customary power enjoys a form of 'impunity', which enables it to lend a degree of legitimacy to illegal activities such as artisanal gold mining.⁹³

In the artisanal gold mining system around the park, it is also the customary authorities who have a say in setting the price at which a gram of gold is sold on the site, as explained by a former gold miner interviewed in Bouna:

It is the customary leader that determines the weight. They set the price per gram. It's not a fixed price because it depends on the period. But in general, it's around 30 000 FCFA (€44). The distribution takes place every week on the production site, immediately after the sale. After a week's production, the representatives of the customary authorities, the landowner, the farmer and the workers all meet 'at the counter'. The counter is on the mine site. This is where the gold extracted during the working week is sold. Negotiations with the buyer are conducted in the presence of these players or their representatives. After the sale, the money is divided among the players according to the percentages agreed before production began.

Artisanal gold mining in the park

In Comoé National Park, the dynamics are different, because of the attitudes and perceptions of the local communities: when artisanal gold mining is practised on their land, it is not perceived as an illegal activity and is de facto supervised by the customary leaders; but when artisanal gold mining is carried out in the park (a protected area that benefits from a specific legal regime, and therefore does not belong to them), they have to accept that they are working in complete illegality. The park is therefore seen by those involved in artisanal gold mining outside the park (for example, the large-scale miners) as a no-man's-land to which customary authorities, whose rights do not extend to this protected area, cannot authorize access.

However, it is in the park that activity is most intense: although it is difficult to provide a precise estimate, an economic operator from Bouna estimates that 'around 60% of artisanal gold mining activity is carried out in the park for the Bounkani and Tchologo regions'.⁹⁴ Apart from this operator, many people explained that they were unable to make an estimate, but all pointed out that the park arouses a great deal of interest (more than outside the park), for two main reasons. The first is the opacity it guarantees, as a territory beyond the control of the administrative and customary authorities. The second is the ease with which gold can be found (at depths of just 2 or 3 metres, compared with tunnels several dozen metres deep outside the park).⁹⁵

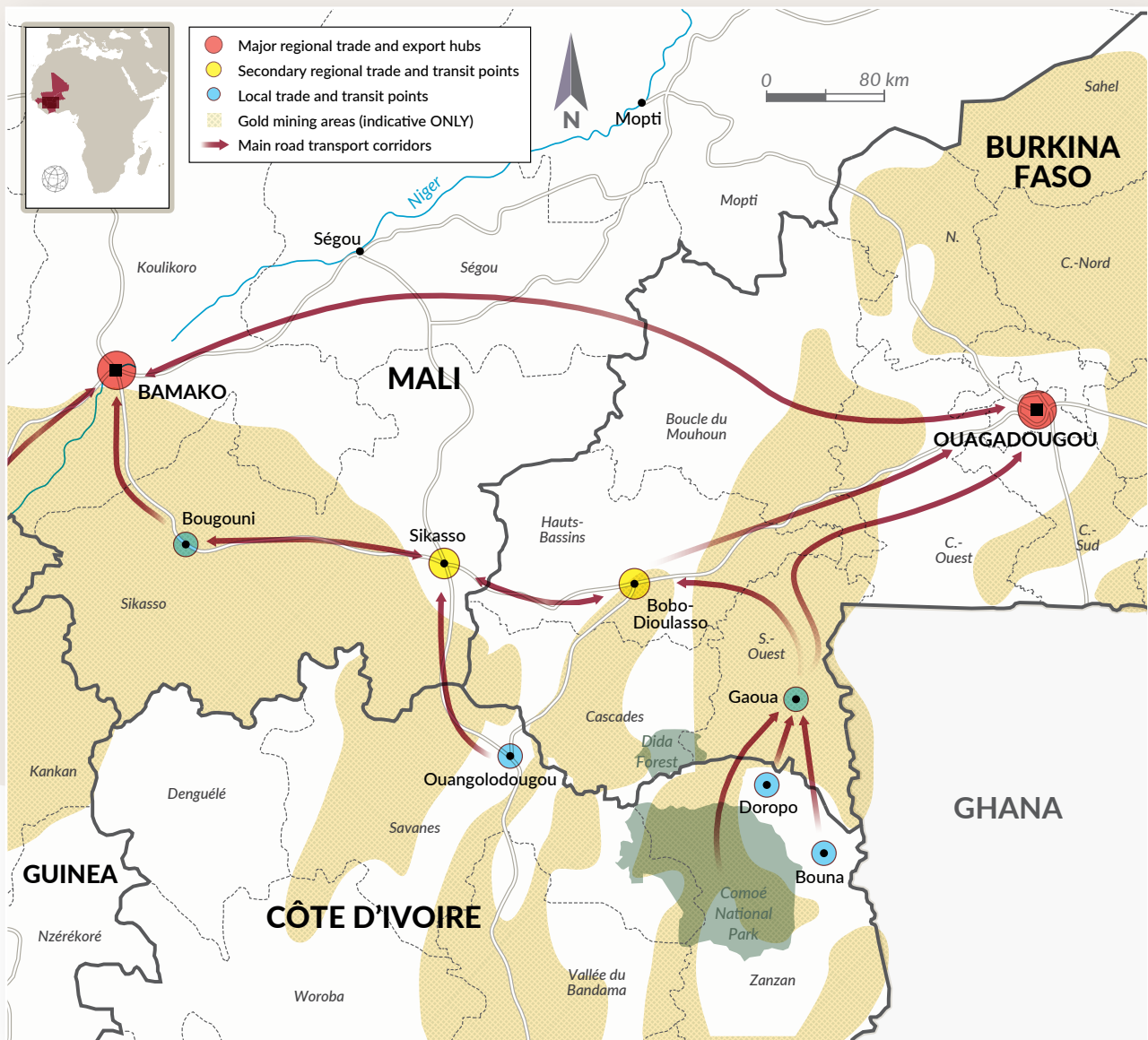


FIGURE 3 Artisanal gold mining and export routes between Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso and Mali.

The sale of gold from inside the park, as with its extraction, is largely unregulated and much less rigid than outside, with pricing determined solely by the buyer and the owner of the site. Moreover, outside the park, those involved in artisanal gold mining are well known and carry out their activities openly, whereas inside the park the identities of certain people, particularly the financiers, remain unknown.⁹⁶ Indeed, as on many artisanal gold mining sites in the sub-region, pre-financing of mining activities is commonplace. A former goldsmith operating in the park explains how this works:

In the park, the operator sets the price per gram by mutual agreement with the buyer. But in some cases, the operator in the field is himself financed by someone else, who provides him with the equipment to detect the gold. This is expensive equipment. They also supply the equipment for extracting and processing the gold. So they finance the whole operation, and sometimes they buy the gold produced on the site. If, for example, the price per gram is set at 30 000 FCFA (€44) outside the park, he may set the price at 20 000 FCFA (€30). In all cases, the price at which he buys is lower than that charged outside the park. This type of site is supervised by men employed by the financier to prevent the operator from selling part of the production to other buyers.⁹⁷

Involvement of armed groups?

Several sources have reported that violent extremist groups are financing certain operations in order to secure a monopoly on the purchase of gold mined on the site, and cite the following elements in support of their argument. Firstly, the arrival of violent extremist groups in the region in 2020 coincided with an increase in clandestine sites in Comoé National Park, including relatively large sites equipped with expensive machines to detect gold, which require more funding than small extraction sites. According to an official from the OPIR, 'the arrival of the terrorists in the region has led to an explosion in the number of illegal sites. Their arrival has clearly intensified activity in the park'.⁹⁸ Local people are wary of the secrecy of those involved in this activity. 'You never see them, yet the site is being exploited and the gold sold,' recounts a former gold miner in Bouna.⁹⁹

In addition, several sources reported that members of extremist groups acted as gold miners in order to recruit young people, but also to conclude contracts and carry out artisanal gold mining. Some have been arrested by the authorities or by Dozos (local hunter militiamen) following security incidents, before they 'realized that they were in fact members of terrorist groups', according to a local gendarme.¹⁰⁰

With regard to recruitment, one police officer explained the situation:

In 2019, in the Burkinabé towns of Farakosso and Gbontchèso, which border Côte d'Ivoire, jihadists recruited many young people with a low level of education as informers and logisticians, initially presenting themselves as gold miners.¹⁰¹

Presenting themselves as gold miners attracts young people who want to earn money, and enables the armed groups to keep a low profile (there is nothing suspicious about being a gold miner in north-east Côte d'Ivoire). By pretending to be gold miners, they are able to obtain new mining sites by concluding agreements with villagers and miners, who have not realized their true identity. Villagers are now caught in the crossfire because they cannot withdraw their cooperation, given the threat from violent extremist groups. Nor can they obtain the support of the authorities, as they run the risk of being accused of complicity.¹⁰²

Others go even further and claim that violent extremist groups are visibly present and directly involved on the artisanal gold mining sites, in Comoé National Park and along the border with Burkina Faso.

In the border area, the localities of Togolokaye (halfway between Tehini, on the edge of the park, and Bodana on the Burkina Faso border) and Mossibougou, north-east of Korhogo about 20 kilometres from Burkina Faso, were mentioned several times in the interviews.¹⁰³ The groups' activity in this area is explained in particular by the fact that they can easily retreat to Burkina Faso if necessary.¹⁰⁴

Several kidnap victims, held hostage in Comoé National Park in 2021 by violent extremist groups, explained that they had been held near gold mining sites and had seen their kidnappers carrying and using gold detection equipment.¹⁰⁵ Other accounts, obtained from traditional authorities, revealed that some members of armed groups had been arrested with gold detection and extraction equipment.¹⁰⁶ Security sources explained that during anti-gold mining operations, numerous weapons have been found including Kalashnikov. This led them to confirm the presence of armed groups and since 2021 has prompted a fierce battle against artisanal gold mining in the area, in particular in the department of Tehini.¹⁰⁷

Responding to artisanal gold mining in the context of the expansion of violent extremist groups

The artisanal gold mining sites in north-east Côte d'Ivoire and throughout the sub-region are often a prime target for violent extremist groups. These sites enable them to generate substantial financial resources to fund their operations (purchasing weapons, motorbikes, fuel, etc.), and also act as hubs for trafficking of all kinds and money laundering.¹⁰⁸ They can also be used to recruit and train young people, particularly in the use of IEDs. A JNIM cell associated with Khalid Ben Walid explained that in 2016 it had received explosives training at a gold mining site in the north of the country, on the border with Mali.¹⁰⁹

Gold sites are also key places for violent extremist groups to deploy their natural resource governance strategies. For example, they may pose as legitimate actors by allowing communities to engage in artisanal gold mining freely,¹¹⁰ while the authorities prohibit or severely restrict access to the sites. The Dozos are suspected of engaging in artisanal gold mining themselves on the sites in question,¹¹¹ and are sometimes tasked with securing mining sites that have been closed and abandoned following government decisions to limit mining in the north-east.¹¹²

Côte d'Ivoire is no exception to this dynamic, and its attempts to repress the activity have resulted in the creation in July 2021 of a special brigade to combat illegal gold mining, the Groupement Spécial de Lutte contre l'Orpillage Illégal. The main task of this unit, made up of 460 gendarmes and 100 water and forestry officers, is to step up the crackdown on illegal gold miners. Numerous missions have been carried out, involving the destruction of sites, the arrest of individuals and the seizure of logistical equipment.¹¹³

Yet artisanal gold mining is an essential source of income for many communities, and is set to grow in Côte d'Ivoire and the sub-region, in the face of demographic, environmental and social pressures on pastoral lifestyles and agriculture.¹¹⁴ The sector also often contributes to a reduction in violence and security risks, as young people working in artisanal gold mining are less vulnerable to the appeals of violent extremist groups, while a ban on artisanal gold mining can lead to a rise in other illicit economies (cattle rustling, robbery). A local authority in Kafolo put it this way:

The big difficulty is that if the authorities put an end to artisanal gold mining, the jihadists can take advantage of this to offer work to young people who will now be idle. If you put an end to artisanal gold mining and tell them to go back to the fields, they can be recruited by the terrorists.¹¹⁵



CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The illicit economies in north-eastern Côte d'Ivoire, marked by the legacy of the rebellion and evolving in a post-conflict context, have now become a thorny security issue with the presence of violent extremist groups and the intensification of illicit economic activities in Comoé National Park and on the border with Burkina Faso. Indeed, an entire region lives to the rhythm of illicit economies, which structure economic and social life. Those involved particularly in artisanal gold mining have infiltrated the various social structures and nodes of the administrative and security apparatus through corruption, and the long-standing networks established during the rebellion are now well entrenched. Despite a lull in the activity of armed groups, the region remains prey to numerous vulnerabilities, due to the porous nature of the border with Burkina Faso and the difficulties in controlling Comoé National Park. To prevent the situation from deteriorating, three main areas of work should be prioritized and implemented jointly by the national and local authorities, and civil society.

For the authorities: Build on what has been achieved and regulate artisanal gold mining

Numerous security measures were taken by the FDS in the wake of the 2020 attacks, including a strengthening of the military deployments in the border zone between Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire. Comoé National Park remains a blind spot, however, and the security arrangements for these areas should be strengthened. The military response, while important and producing positive results to date, needs to be coupled with socio-economic efforts. These could include, for example, the development of basic services such as roads, access to electricity and learning centres to encourage local development (in agriculture, for example). In particular, a policy on artisanal gold mining regulation, given the vulnerability of the sector, should be a priority.

All policies relating to gold mining must recognize the role of gold mining as an instrument of peace.¹¹⁶ Responses must take into account not only the role of gold mining in financing conflict, but also as a livelihood and, more broadly, its importance in local and regional political economies. Crackdowns and prohibitions aimed at limiting access risk increasing vulnerability and, as a result, insecurity and the development of other illicit economies. Responses must therefore be balanced between repression and regularization so that communities can benefit from it. Côte d'Ivoire, for example, has introduced a system of authorization for small-scale mining that should help regulate the activity, but the

bureaucracy is too great and issuing authorizations is slow and costly. Another problem with these permits is that they are reserved for Ivorian citizens, whereas many gold miners are from Burkina Faso, Mali and Guinea. Finally, repressive policies should focus on the most harmful actors, who are often close to important political figures, instead of blocking community access to gold mining sites. The fight against impunity and corruption is crucial for reducing artisanal gold mining activity without alienating communities.

For civil society working with the authorities: Strengthen trust between the authorities and citizens

Although the security response and the strengthening of the military presence in areas threatened by violent extremist groups is necessary (in particular by establishing bases in towns and villages and not just in regional capitals), it is also a question of building trust between the authorities, including the FDS, and the communities. To achieve this, dialogues can be organized, and the FDS can also support and participate in local citizens' initiatives. Some initiatives of this type have already begun, with the creation of civil-military committees, an initiative that is to be welcomed but which could use more support, including financial support, if it is to function properly. In addition, all initiatives aimed at strengthening control over an area must necessarily involve the local communities. The FDS must not be seen as predatory, which is sometimes the case when initiatives are not understood and communities face racketeering and corruption from the authorities. Community-watch initiatives between communities and local authorities to improve information gathering, as is the case in Moro-Moro for example, could be replicated in other localities.

For communities working with civil society and the authorities: Social cohesion and inclusion

Several civil society organizations have understood the importance of community cohesion, which is being undermined by the increase in crime and the activities of violent extremist groups, and several programmes are being funded to this end. Forums for dialogue between communities, and in particular between community leaders, should be organized on a regular basis, and on an ad hoc basis to resolve conflicts between herders and farmers, for example. In this way, the communities would be involved at every stage in the resolution of disputes. Other initiatives that could be taken in this area include radio programmes to raise the profile of communities, promoting understanding and reducing stigmatization. Such initiatives have already been started in some places, such as by the Fulani community in Doropo and Bouna, which organizes cultural days. These can be replicated with the support of civil society and the authorities if necessary, as well as the international community.



NOTES

- 1 See other reports on this subject: Antônio Sampaio et al, Reserve assets: Armed groups and conflict economics in the national parks of Burkina Faso, Niger and Benin, GI-TOC, May 2023, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/armed-groups-conflict-economies-national-parks-west-africa/>; GI-TOC, The role of national parks in illicit economies and conflict dynamics, Illicit Economies and Instability Dialogue, 26–27 October 2022, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/national-parks-illicit-economies-conflict/>.
- 2 Lucia Bird and Lyes Tagziria, Organized crime and instability dynamics: Mapping illicit hubs in West Africa, GI-TOC, September 2022, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/west-africa-illicit-hub-mapping/>.
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- 7 Observatory of Illicit Economies in West Africa, Northern Côte d'Ivoire: new jihadist threats, old criminal networks, Risk Bulletin issue 1, GI-TOC, September 2021, <https://riskbulletins.globalinitiative.net/wea-obs-001/01-northern-cote-d-ivoire-jihadist-threats-criminal-networks.html>.
- 8 Words of an artisanal gold miner in Doropo reported by Alan Martin and Héléne Helbig de Balzac, The West African Eldorado: Mapping the illicit gold trade in Côte d'Ivoire, Mali and Burkina Faso, Partnership Africa Canada, 2017, <https://impacttransform.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/2016-Jan-The-West-African-El-Dorado-Mapping-the-illicit-trade-of-gold-in-Cote-DIvoire-Mali-and-Burkina-Faso.pdf>.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Côte d'Ivoire was, and still is, primarily an extraction zone, with the main hubs for artisanal gold exports being Mali and, to a lesser extent, Burkina Faso.
- 11 Alan Martin and Héléne Helbig de Balzac, The West African Eldorado: Mapping the illicit gold trade in Côte d'Ivoire, Mali and Burkina Faso, Partnership Africa Canada, 2017, <https://impacttransform.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/2016-Jan-The-West-African-El-Dorado-Mapping-the-illicit-trade-of-gold-in-Cote-DIvoire-Mali-and-Burkina-Faso.pdf>.
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- 16 ACLED data analysis, <https://acleddata.com/>.
- 17 Flore Berger, The silent threat: Kidnappings in Burkina Faso, GI-TOC, March 2023, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/kidnappings-burkina-faso/>.
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